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# Fund-Raising as a Key to the Library's Future

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## ABSTRACT

THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF library fund-raising in the United States is reviewed within the context of library history as well as in the greater context of the development of contemporary philanthropy in this country. The role that fund-raising can play in the articulation of a library's mission as well as the contribution it can provide to management objectives are examined. The author concludes that fund-raising can play a critical role in the future of today's libraries.

## INTRODUCTION

The environment in which libraries operate has changed dramatically in many ways. Still, the libraries that Carnegie and others helped build often appear to be the same. In other words, the traditional function of libraries to provide a safe place for the accumulated knowledge of humans has remained much the same while the ways to package the information and distribute it have changed dramatically. Scholarly communication has gone through some major changes because of the development of communication networks, technology-based forms of knowledge, increased production of scholarly information, and the capacity of libraries to deliver and preserve the last century's knowledge that was primarily printed on acidic paper. The electronic library is fast approaching.

Libraries are faced not only with the rapid growth rate of information but also with continued increases in costs for materials

and services which most often exceed the rate of inflation. Meeting these needs demands additional resources that appear not to be available from traditional sources. As Vartan Gregorian (1991) so elegantly put it in his foreword to *Raising Money for Academic and Research Libraries*:

From the clay tablets of Babylonia to the computers of modern research libraries stretch more than 5,000 years of men's and women's insatiable desire to establish written immortality. It is, therefore, critical that...[we] promote libraries as worthy recipients of philanthropy. Our intellectual heritage depends on the success of this mission. It cannot be done by a single financial source. (p. v)

## HISTORY

The beginning of private support for American public libraries was usually attributed to John Harvard when he bequeathed some 300 volumes from his private library to a struggling colonial college which today is, of course, Harvard University. Benjamin Franklin's launching of a subscription library in Philadelphia in 1731 served as a model for many other libraries in Europe and North America. Franklin intended to promote equal access (among Americans of the time). The first financing of a public library from public dollars came about when the Reverend Abiel Abbott convinced citizens to support the Peterborough Town Library in New Hampshire in 1833 (Clark, 1992). However, the birth of the public library movement in the United States really began in earnest in the mid-nineteenth century as Americans supported the notion for a free education which was inherent in the democratic promise. It also provided a response to the varying social requirements in a democracy as well as a reflection of the idealism that characterized the Enlightenment period in America (Curley, 1990).

The trust by citizens in private philanthropy to assist in the public library movement was rewarded by such individuals as Jacob Astor in New York City, Joshua Bates in Boston, Enoch Pratt in Baltimore, and, of course, Andrew Carnegie in over 1,500 communities across the land. Private philanthropy was a stimulus for public tax support. However, some have argued that the reverse can also be true, contemporary examples of which are briefly mentioned later.

The shift from subscription lending libraries to mainly publicly supported libraries took well over 100 years. However, community support grew for public libraries even during the depression as libraries served many unemployed. Roosevelt's New Deal through the Works Progress Administration spent millions by creating jobs for Americans in libraries. The postwar economic boom saw marked expansion of suburbs and along with them came a public library in almost every one. In 1956, the Library Services Act was signed

primarily for the extension of library services to rural areas. And, in 1964, the Library Services and Construction Act was signed by President Johnson, which created another major building cycle for public libraries.

Budget cuts started in the 1970s, and libraries were once again faced with troubled times. Galvanization of grassroots support for local libraries around the United States in the 1980s and 1990s has appeared to stem the tide of budget cuts, often because of the support of voters rather than the help of politicians (Berry, 1993).

Being able to obtain multiple sources of support for the library appears to have become part of the effective librarian's portfolio. Seeking the right balance of support from local, state, national, and private sources has been, and continues to be, a major challenge for libraries. A library development program integrated within the library structure can assist in bringing clarity to this chronic problem.

## THE NEED AND CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

The need to serve more and diverse functions has often brought pressure upon libraries and librarians to become more efficient and to find additional resources. Traditional resources—tax dollars, tuition revenue, and other fees—have not been able to meet the demand, thus the search for alternative funding sources, including fund-raising from private donors, has taken on a new perspective and importance to libraries across America. Durrance and Van Fleet (1992) surveyed library leaders in 1990, and those leaders identified five categories of changes that would affect public libraries in the 1990s. Planning to meet community needs, adopting public relations, marketing strategies, and fund-raising are three of the categories which clearly stress the need for a library development program. It is not sufficient to just affirm the need for fund-raising; an aggressive and organized activity that is professionally managed is required.

As more nonprofit institutions are created (over 1 million according to Independent Sector estimates), and as more and more public sector organizations seek funding from nongovernmental sources, competition for private support has increased dramatically. In his seminal work on fund-raising in university libraries, Andrew Eaton (1971) observed that most librarians did not consider fund-raising their business, and thus it had been a neglected part of librarianship. Some eight years later, Breivik and Gibson (1979) also noted that "most libraries seem reluctant to engage in major fund-raising efforts" (pp. 8-9). Even today reluctance among librarians still exists.

This reluctance takes the form of concern that libraries embarking on private fund-raising (especially public libraries and academic

libraries in public institutions) do it for the wrong reason—i.e., to make up for losses in basic support that are considered by many to be a public or institutional responsibility. Librarians need to think about the purposes for which alternative funding sources are sought. Whether from individuals, foundations, or federal grants, the new and innovative, the special and extra service, and that which makes for excellence, comprise the most appropriate purposes for private library support. White (1992) captured this thought in his argument that the management structure must be held accountable for funding libraries adequately, and that libraries are not charitable organizations. Jeffrey Krull (1991) also has warned that library fund-raising should be used to “supplement, not supplant” (p. 65). Patrick O’Brien has noted that one should cast private fund-raising as “more parsley on the potatoes; not the potatoes” (in Rawlinson, 1991, p. 67). All of these warnings, of course, are intended to reinforce the understanding that public libraries are a “public” responsibility and therefore must primarily be funded by tax dollars.

### A DEVELOPING FIELD

Major changes have taken place since Eaton’s observation in 1971. Not only do we have a vast array of how-to-do fund-raising literature available (Hayes, 1990) in the form of books, magazines, *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* newspaper, and thousands of articles, but we have the beginnings of a small and growing body of scholarly literature. Examples of the scholarly literature can be found in the *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *Voluntas*, *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, and the publications of the Independent Sector research forums. In addition, a new index entitled *Philanthropic Studies Index* covers the English language literature relevant to the nonprofit and voluntary sector including much on fund-raising.

Over thirty academic and research centers have been formed in the United States in the last two decades—all of which are adding important contributions to the study and research in the field (Crowder & Hodgkinson, 1991). The most comprehensive of these is the Center on Philanthropy, established at Indiana University in 1987. In 1993, an international and multidisciplinary scholarly association was formed—i.e., the International Society for Third-Sector Research (ISTR). Part of its purpose is to understand philanthropic behavior, which illustrates further the growing importance attributed to the subject of fund-raising.

Marked growth has also taken place in the membership of professional fund-raising associations. The Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), The National Society for Fundraising Executives (NSFRE), Association for Healthcare

Philanthropy (AHP), to name only three, have more than doubled their numbers in the last twenty years. In addition, the Foundation Center's (1993) latest directory of funding sources for libraries and information services, published in 1993, is approximately 150 pages long (Olson et al., 1993).

Professional organizations have often added divisions or committees that deal with fund-raising. In the 1980s, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Fund Raising and Development Discussion Group, the Library Administration and Management Association (LAMA) Fund Raising and Financial Development Section, and the Public Library Association (PLA) Fund Raising Committee were established (Burlingame, 1991). In 1987, a group of professional library development officers formed and today are known as DORAL, N.A. (Development Officers of Research Academic Libraries, North America).

A March 1992 SPEC survey of the members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) showed that fund-raising was a well developed function in many research libraries (ARL, 1993). Three other important studies of fund-raising in libraries have been carried out under the auspices of the American Library Association over the last five years. *Non-Tax Sources of Revenue for Public Libraries* (1988) found that likely sources for private support of libraries were from individuals or friends groups (Lynch, 1988). Only 14.9 percent reported no income obtained from fund-raising (p. 2). However, the study concluded that most libraries have not developed their private fund-raising capabilities. *Alternative Sources of Revenue in Academic Libraries* was a companion study which found that private fund-raising was significant in higher educational institutions—particularly those that granted doctorates (ALA, 1991, p. 2).

The LAMA fund-raising section conducted a survey of academic, public, and state libraries in 1985 (Fischler, 1987; Burlingame, 1987) with a follow-up study of public libraries in 1989 (Burlingame, 1990). What was important in these two companion studies was that a majority of librarians felt that fund-raising was important in meeting special needs and in gaining valuable support. The Burlingame (1990) study found that public libraries use the book sale as the most common type of fund-raiser and that the public relations function of fund-raising activities was as important as the dollars raised from private sources. The role that volunteers and special events play in getting public attention for the mission of the library and the subsequent confirmation of that belief by citizens voting for library levies needs to be studied further.

### GROWING IMPORTANCE OF FUND-RAISING

The growing importance of fund-raising in libraries is evidenced by the increasing number of professional positions on library staffs

as well as development staffs in academic institutions that are devoted to library fund-raising. In addition, articles in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the *New York Times*, and local presses all tell success stories of libraries receiving major gifts of money and collections as well as the important day-to-day contributions of volunteers that make a difference in the quality of library services. From the \$20 million gift to the University of Florida Libraries to the \$2,000 "Auction Action" fund-raiser at Deerfield (Illinois) Public Library, the variety and importance of fund-raising in libraries today takes on new meaning.

James Swan (1990) noted that librarians across the United States recognize that there is great potential for fund-raising in libraries, and that we need to take advantage of the opportunity to tell the library's story and go out and ask for the support. The library development program can be used to assist libraries in conveying their mission and thereby stemming the tide of slashing library budgets. In fact, most recently this appears to have happened in public libraries as evidenced by the *Library Journal's* survey in 1992 (St. Lifer & Rogers, 1993). Gallup polls conducted in 1992 found that community leaders and library users and nonusers advocated doubling the per capita support for public libraries (Quinn & Rogers, 1992). Referenda for building or renovating public libraries between July 1, 1990 and June 30, 1991 had an 85 percent approval rate (Hall, 1992) which represented an improvement over recent prior years. Often this citizen support for libraries has been mobilized by Friends of the Library groups. The importance of having a citizens group with no vested interest should not be underestimated (Dolnick, 1990). Volunteers, whether or not they are members of the Friends groups, can also play an important part in stretching limited budgets as well as contributing to public relations efforts and fund-raising programs (McCune, 1993).

## MISSION

What does development have to do with the mission of the library? Everything. Going through the process of setting up a library development program will clarify and enhance one's understanding of the organization's mission. Strategic planning is one method to arrive at the goals—what you want to achieve; objectives—how you achieve the goals; and the services—methods you use to achieve the above. All of those clarify the library mission.

External and internal environmental scans, along with a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis, are often used to arrive at understandings on what social need is central to the library and how to respond to meeting the need. Our external

environment is considerably different today than two decades ago. We are operating in an economic world which Lester Thurow (1992) has called the zero sum society. The United States has moved from having a surplus in trade to having a significant deficit. We have also become one of the world's largest debtor nations. There is little doubt that the financial picture of the country cannot help but affect library funding and, in fact, it has been particularly viable when you look at the boundary shifts among what public library services are funded by the federal, state, and local governments. More pressure on local and state governments has forced greater calls for efficiency and accountability. Public libraries are not an exception. Such external changes mandate that libraries become more visible and effective in illustrating the importance and depth of their contribution to society. A development program can contribute to such an effort.

A planning process, or what some libraries call "needs assessment," will ultimately provide the basis for the case statement. This broad based and intensive self-examination measures the current condition of the library against the mission. The case statement articulates convincing arguments for those who should support the fund-raising effort, and it educates library leadership so that they are better able to effectively verbalize the case. Needless to say, such an understanding is not only imperative for raising support from private donors but will also serve the library leader and manager well in other operational roles.

Steele and Elder (1992), in *Becoming a Fundraiser*, emphasize the importance of the library finding its niche. What makes one unique? Thinking through the purpose of the library may seem trite at first; however, it may:

provide you with a renewed appreciation of how your organization benefits its various constituencies and help you reawaken the basic assumptions and beliefs that are the key to articulating your vision with freshness and excitement. Most important in terms of fundraising, the answers that you come up with may supply you with those very ideas that will attract, stimulate, and motivate donors. (p. 53)

Articulating the library's mission so it addresses what need is being met by the organization suggests that the case statement will be most effective when it is directed to meeting the donor's needs, for it is the match of the donor's need with the institutional provision that will translate into successful fund-raising. This principle applies equally well in obtaining public dollars, or campus dollars, or other potential sources of support for the library. Understanding the library's history and how it fits into the community will provide the basis for "the courtroom full of potential donors [to] be convinced to vote 'yea' on the library's fundraising campaign" (Clay, 1990, p. 150).

## EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Fund-raising can lead to enhanced personal effectiveness and leadership because it requires a belief in oneself, and it also requires one to be an effective listener—both important attributes for any library leader. Library fund-raising requires the participation of the library director and others in the library who are where the action is. Donors want to hear from those who are in a position of responsibility. Just as successful college or university development programs require the support and leadership of the president, library development requires the support and leadership of the director of the library.

Librarians need to enter the fund-raising arena with positive attitudes and a list of opportunities, not with negative attitudes about asking for money and a set of problems. Donors want opportunities, and library leadership needs to provide them. In other words, the donors need you as well as you need them. "The fund-raising cycle is a constant one of developing relationships based upon a shared mission, asking, giving, and recognition. Such a process cannot take place without two parties at the negotiation table. Both are crucial" (Burlingame, 1992, p. 149).

This philanthropic relationship is based on two principles clearly stated by Steele and Elder (1992) as:

1. Library fundraising seeks consonance between a donor's wishes and a library's needs. Hence, it should proceed in an open, ethical, balanced, win-win way.
2. Fundraising is judged to be successful when it results in gifts that contribute to the strategic vision for the library to achieve; gifts should free a library to achieve its goals rather than hamper or distract it from its mission. (p. 1)

While there is a large quantity of practical fund-raising literature, there has not been a significant body of research developed, although some progress is beginning to be made. Perhaps the lack of interest in research in fund-raising can be partly explained by the negative attitude that many have for asking for money. As Robert Payton (1987) noted: "A lot of people don't want to be bothered with the fund-raising, don't like it, find it distasteful, and don't want to be involved with it at all. They want to limit themselves to a 'concern for the problem'" (p. 2).

If the library leader does have a dislike for fund-raising, confronting it head-on and learning what fund-raising is and how it works is probably the best personal cure. It will also contribute to the library's fiscal health.

The skills required to be an effective leader are much the same as those required of a successful fund-raiser. In fact, fund-raising



can reinforce the skills necessary for effective library leadership, and leadership development enforces effective fund-raising.

## PUBLIC RELATIONS

There is little doubt that well-run library development programs can lead to increased public awareness of the library. In fact, public relations provides the foundation upon which a fund-raising program is built. Or, if not the foundation, it at least complements the development effort. Some have argued that fund-raising can even be a specialization of public relations (Kelly, 1989). Some fifteen years earlier, Jesse Shera (1972), in his seminal work, *The Foundations of Education for Librarianship*, argued that the librarian's fundamental knowledge is concerned with:

the interaction of human minds communicating across the barriers of space and time....Because the role of the librarian is one of mediation in the world of recorded knowledge, his understanding of the communication process must be interdisciplinary in its roots; the librarian must comprehensively relate communication to a wide spectrum of human activities, involving a divergent variety of cultural groups, encompassing all ages and strata of intellectual competence.... (pp. 204-05)

Kelly (1989) argued that we need to redefine fund-raising as donor relations. Therefore public relations is seen as the broader term—i.e., management of the activities that allow an institution to communicate with its public. Fund-raising becomes the narrower term that is restricted to those activities that deal directly with donor relations (p. 12). Using such a model argues for a shift in the public relations paradigm to include fund-raising. By doing so, one would, by extension, need to argue that fund-raising is an important component of library leadership, since every library director needs to be concerned with the translation of the library's mission with its many and varied publics (for a more detailed discussion of this argument, the reader is referred to Kelly's [1991], *Fund-Raising and Public Relations: A Critical Analysis*).

## CONCLUSION

This overview of the role that fund-raising in particular, and development more broadly, plays and will play in the future of libraries is not exhaustive. It illustrates some trends that will affect the future economic health of our institutions as we strive to carry out the traditional and future mission of storage and access to information. With a focus on the donor-recipient relationship, effective library leaders will build better collections and provide better service for their patrons. Library fund-raising is critical, and it demands increased professional and skillful volunteer efforts to meet

the increasing needs of library users in a time of increased competition for public and private resources.

This discussion of fund-raising reminds this author of the classical story of Sir Christopher Wren. While overseeing the building of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, he asked two stonecutters what they were doing. The first replied that he was cutting stone. The second responded by saying he was building a cathedral. Library development can help one see the "big picture" and provide a focus on actualizing the library's mission with support from multiple sources.

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